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FLORIDA HEALTHY BABIES INITIATIVE HELPS BREASTFEEDING MOM RETURN TO WORK

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For Alicea Young, making the decision to breastfeed her daughter was easy. Debating how she would continue breastfeeding after returning to work was not so easy.

“During my recent pregnancy, I often worried about where I would pump once I returned to work,” said the Pinellas mother of two.

Alicea recalls using a breast pump after her first pregnancy with her now five-year-old son: “I would have to do it in the handicap bathroom several times a day,” she said.

The idea of preparing her child’s meal in the bathroom felt completely unsanitary, no matter how well she cleaned the area. “I would not want my food prepared or eaten in a bathroom stall,” she added.

This made it very difficult for Alicea to continue breastfeeding her son in 2012 and she was worried the same obstacles would deter her from continuing to breastfeed her seven-month-old daughter. Her biggest fear was that she would stop breastfeeding as early as she did with her son. She breastfed for four months with her son: “It was a great length of time, but, it was not my goal. My goal was to breastfeed until he was at least one.”

Thanks to the Florida Healthy Babies Initiative, a collaborative statewide project to positively influence social determinants and reduce racial disparity in infant mortality, the staff at the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas (DOH-Pinellas) and the leaders at the R’Club Child Care/Lew Williams Center for Early Learning, Alicea was surprised when she returned to work to find a dedicated nursing room that all staff and parents could use for feeding and pumping.

Ulas Butler, Lew Williams Center for Early Learning Director, and Dr. Susan Weber, the center’s Director of Professional Development, worked alongside DOH-Pinellas’ Community Outreach Champion, Samantha Staley, who heads the Florida Healthy Babies Initiative in Pinellas, to designate the center as a Gold Level Breastfeeding Friendly Employer. To receive the Breastfeeding Friendly Award, the early learning center had to develop a written breastfeeding policy for its facility. With that policy, employees are provided a private lactation room, flexibility in their schedules to allow for pumping breaks, and resources and help if needed.



Alicea Young and her daughter with Ulas Butler, R’Club Child Care/Lew Williams Center for Early Learning Director, in the new nursing room at the child care center in St. Petersburg.

With a strong focus on health equity when it comes to breastfeeding, safe sleep and improved access to resources, Florida Healthy Babies in Pinellas works with many community partners such as the Tampa Bay Breastfeeding Task Force-Pinellas Chapter, the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas and many others, to reduce infant deaths, close the black-white infant mortality gap and improve health outcomes for all babies in Pinellas County.

In Pinellas, black infants are nearly three times more likely to die before their first birthday than white infants. The highest cause of death for black infants is Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID). In previous years, the leading cause of death was prematurity/low birth weight.

One way to reduce this disparity for black infants is to increase breastfeeding rates among black mothers. The focus on breastfeeding is particularly important because breastfeeding can help reduce the risk of SUIDs.

Through the support and guidance of the initiative, the center achieved, not one but two, breastfeeding awards: the Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare Award and a Gold Level Breastfeeding Friendly Employer Award.

Alicea returned to work in December and, when she saw the room for the first time, she broke down in tears. Having a place to comfortably pump was a huge factor in her breastfeeding success with her daughter. Having an employer who not only understands the needs of a breastfeeding mother, but also supports her decision to breastfeed, is sometimes hard to come by but it's crucial.

"This has made my breastfeeding experience a pleasant one," said Alicea.

Ensuring all mothers in Pinellas have a similar breastfeeding experience is something the initiative continues to work toward. To date, the initiative has helped 11 child care centers become Breastfeeding Friendly Employers. The Lew Williams Center for Early Learning is one of six centers that recently received the award.

For more information about the Florida Healthy Babies Initiative in Pinellas, go to <http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wellness-programs/healthy-babies/index.html> or call Samantha Staley at 727-824-6900, ext. 4632.

For more information about DOH-Pinellas, go to www.PinellasHealth.com or follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyPinellas](https://twitter.com/HealthyPinellas).

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